



# THE MENTALLY STRONG LEADER: STRATEGIES FOR RESILIENCE DURING UNCERTAIN TIMES

Iowa Engineering Conference  
ACEC—Iowa and Iowa Engineer Society  
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## GRATITUDE: ALWAYS A GREAT PLACE TO START...



Please tell one thing that  
you are thankful for today!

## THE MENTALLY STRONG LEADER



### Strategies for Resilience During Uncertain Times

## MENTAL STRENGTH; RESILIENCE

**“I’ve faced difficult times before. I can handle whatever is thrown my way, with wisdom, creativity, common sense, and a can-do attitude. If you knock me down five times, I’m coming back six. Knock me down six, I’m coming back seven.”**



Go up and never stop

**“My mind is my biggest asset. I expect to win every tournament I play.”  
-Tiger Woods**



DO SOMETHING GREAT

**“Every quarterback can throw a ball; every running back can run; every receiver is fast; but that mental toughness that you talk about translates into competitiveness.”**

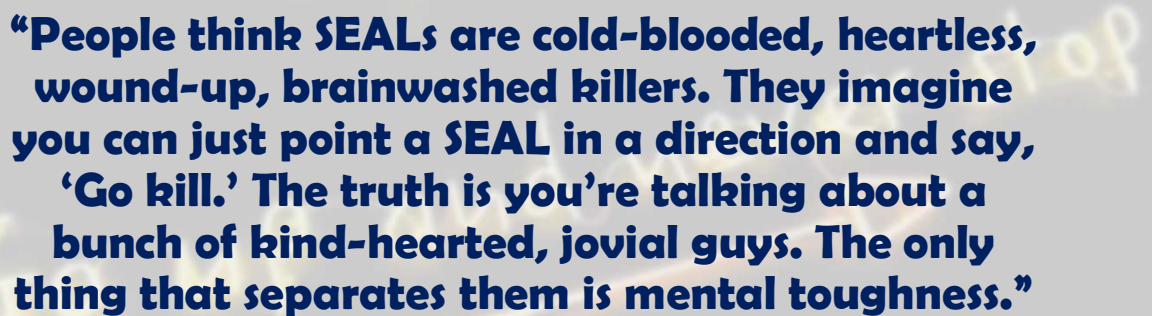
**-Tom Brady**



Go up and never stop

**“After all these years putting the mental work in,  
it’s paid off.”**

**-Simone Biles**



Go up and never stop

**“People think SEALs are cold-blooded, heartless,  
wound-up, brainwashed killers. They imagine  
you can just point a SEAL in a direction and say,  
‘Go kill.’ The truth is you’re talking about a  
bunch of kind-hearted, jovial guys. The only  
thing that separates them is mental toughness.”**

**-Howard E. Wasdin**

## TEN STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING MENTAL STRENGTH...

1. Tweak your mind for daily strength.
2. Be aware of what lens you are wearing.
3. Focus your energy on things within your control or influence.
4. Put in the effort to develop positive, healthy relationships in your life.
5. Increase your self-awareness.
6. Tap into recent research regarding protection from stress.
7. Check your interpretations for accuracy.
8. Create your own identity.
9. Recognize the power within you to create a 'new normal' at work or home.
10. Live and work with Mojo!



### STRATEGY 1: TWEAK YOUR MIND FOR DAILY STRENGTH.

The Harvard Business School Professor's  
**Don't Stop Believin'**  
Challenge



“Standing in front of a group of peers, students belted out the Journey song ‘Don’t Stop Believin’ into a microphone. A voice recognition program on the Nintendo Wii automatically scored their performance on an accuracy scale from 1 to 100 percent, assessing volume, pitch, and note duration. They would earn a bonus for high scores.”

· What advice would you give?

- Before the performances, researchers randomly assigned students:
- *Control group (no coaching/instructions)*
- *“I am anxious” group*
- *“I am excited” group*

· Would it impact their scores?



- **Control group:**  
69% accuracy
- *I Am Anxious* group:  
53% accuracy
- *I Am Excited* group:  
80% accuracy

(Study by Harvard Business School's Alison Wood Brooks, in Adam Grant's *Originals: How Non-Conformists Move the World*)



## THERE ARE VERY REAL ADVANTAGES TO TWEAKING OUR THINKING TO BE MORE OPTIMISTIC!



- Graduate Record Exam (GRE) Experiment by Jeremy Jamieson (Harvard)
- Two groups of undergrad's given a practice GRE exam:
  - 1<sup>st</sup> group took the test as normal
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> group was asked to read a paragraph before taking the test: Don't worry if you are anxious...it could be helping you do better

## THE RESULTS...

- The group that read the paragraph scored an average of 55 points higher.
- One month later, the same participants took the actual GRE, and the difference was even greater, i.e., a 65-point difference.

(Jamieson, Harvard, as reported  
in Lerner & Schlechter)



## LITTLE TWEAKS IN HOW WE THINK CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE...

- This is going to be a disaster.
- I'll never get caught up on all of this paperwork.
- We're never going to make it through this merger.
- My stress is only going to get worse.
- My life is over.
- Go on without me.



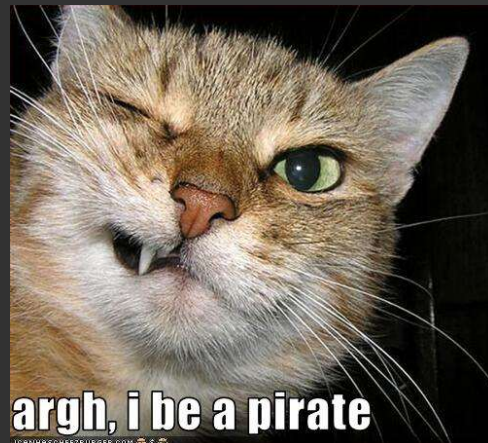
- I/We can get through this.
- This is not my 1<sup>st</sup> rodeo.
- I am smart, tough, and capable.
- I've survived hard things before.
- When the going gets tough, I dig in and get stronger.
- I am a powerful IA Engineering Conference attendee...  
*Don't even try to mess with me!*



## A DAILY, POSITIVE TWEAK TO IMPROVE MOOD & ENERGY—**SAY ARG!**

- **A**nticipate
- **R**ecollect
- **G**ratITUDE

(Eric Barker)



## STRATEGY 2: BE AWARE OF WHAT LENS YOU ARE WEARING.

- October 3, 1987
- Each of us has a lens through which we view everything that happens each day.
- Each of us has certain comfortable, familiar pairs...that we wear most often.



- The problem is that many of the lenses we wear do not give us an accurate view of reality.
- Many times, we put on these lenses due to happenings in our life: *1997-98 in the Hamilton family*
- The "Every Time That Phone Rings It's Bad News" Lens



## OH, THE LENSES THAT WE WEAR...

- **The Failure Lens:** "I messed up, again. I can never get anything right."
- **The Guilt-Ridden Lens:** "I must have done something wrong."
- **The Victim Lens:** "The world is out to get me."
- **The "Nothing Goes Right in My Life" Lens**
- **The "No One Appreciates Me" Lens**
- **The "All the People I Work With Are Messed Up" Lens**

Which lenses are comfortable and familiar to you?



## These lenses certainly impact how we view and interact with the world.

A traveler came upon an old farmer hoeing in his field beside the road.  
Eager to rest his feet, the traveler hailed the farmer, who seemed happy to straighten his back and talk for a moment.

"What sort of people live in the next town?" the traveler asked the farmer.

"Well," replied the farmer, "What were the people like in the town you just came from?"

"Sorry to say," replied the traveler, "They were a bad lot. Troublemakers all, and lazy too. The most selfish people in the world; not a one of them to be trusted. I'm happy to be leaving those scoundrels."

"Is that so?" replied the old farmer.

"Well, I'm afraid that you'll find that same sort in the next town."

Disappointed, the traveler trudged on his way,  
and the farmer returned to his work.



Some time later another traveler--coming from the same direction that the first one had come from--hailed the farmer, and they stopped to talk.

This traveler asked, "What sort of people live in the next town?"

Again, the farmer replied, "Well, what were the people like in the town you just came from?"

"Honest to gosh," said the traveler. "They were the best people in the world. Hard working, honest, friendly as can be. I'm sorry to be leaving them."

"Fear not," said the farmer.

"My suspicion strongly tells me that you'll find that same sort in the next town."

(<http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/traveltales.html#twotravelersandfarmer>)



## WHAT LENS WILL YOU CHOOSE TO WEAR EACH DAY?

- A lens that focuses on all the negative aspects of work, people, yourself, and life?
- Or a lens that looks for the good in yourself, others, work and life?
- **Shawn Achor:**  
**We each train our brain on what to get 'stuck' on.**  
(That's why ARG is a great daily practice!)



## **P.S. ON WEARING A POSITIVE 'LENS': ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS AND WELL-RESPECTED STUDIES...**

- **The Catholic Nun Study** ("Positive Emotions in Early Life and Longevity: Findings from the Nun Study" by Deborah D. Danner, David A. Snowden, and Wallace V. Friesen, University of Kentucky)
- **180 nuns from the School Sisters of Notre Dame**
- **"The nuns whose journal entries had more overtly joyful content lived nearly ten years longer than the nuns whose entries were more negative or neutral." (*The Happiness Advantage*, Shawn Achor)**
- **Age 85: 34% of the least happy quartile of nuns were alive**
- **Age 85: 90% of the most happy quartile of nuns were alive**



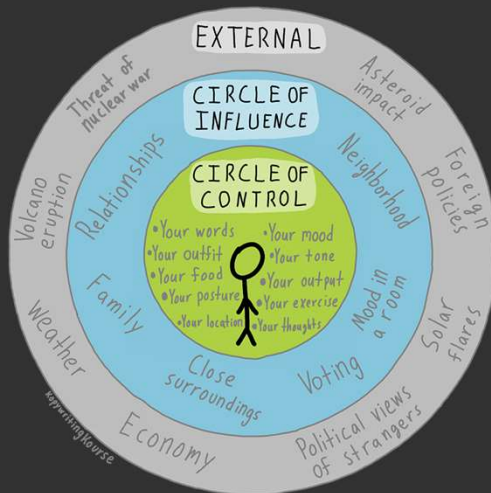
**"A person's level of optimism in the first year of law school predicted his income a decade later. An increase of one tiny point on the optimism scale was worth an extra \$33,000 a year...Optimists live longer, are healthier and happier, make better financial plans, and are more successful."**

**- Tali Sharot, *The Optimism Bias: the Irrationally Positive Brain***

**“Pessimism...is like smoking two and a half packs of cigarettes a day.”**

**-Dr. Martin Seligman, qtd. by Johns Hopkins University**

**STRATEGY 3:  
FOCUS YOUR ENERGY ON THINGS  
WITHIN YOUR CONTROL OR INFLUENCE.**



**The Control Quiz!**

**Do not waste your precious time and energy worrying about something that you have no control over.**

## **STRATEGY 4:** **PUT IN THE EFFORT TO BUILD HEALTHY, POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS.**

- The 'Plunge Your Hands in Freezing Water' Experiment (University of Florida):
- Undergrads put their hand in freezing water for up to three minutes.
- **Four groups:**
  - *Alone*
  - *Had brought a friend to sit with them*
  - *Were assigned a 'friend' to be supportive of them*
  - *Were assigned a 'friend' who was not supportive*
- Those who were either alone or with the unsupportive friend reported 25% more pain than the other two groups.



- **Dr. Dennis Charney, Mount Sinai:**  
A critical factor in being resilient during stressful times is relationships
- POW's during the Vietnam War;  
Many in solitary confinement for years
- Developed a tap code so they could still have human interaction

**“We interviewed maybe 40 or so of the POWs from Vietnam who were held in prison in Hanoi for 5, 6, 7, even 8 years, and many of them were in solitary confinement. That was the most stressful part of being a POW. They developed a ‘tap’ code in which they could communicate to each other through the wall about what was happening to them. And the way the tap code worked is: there were five rows of five letters. If you tapped once, that was row one, A, B, C, D, E. And then, if you tap three times after that, that’d be the third letter in that row.”**

**(Dr. Dennis Charney)**

**“They used a tap code because they weren’t even allowed to talk. They tapped through the wall, and many times communicated very intimate things about what they were feeling, about their lives, about their families. And they told us over and over again that without that tap code, they wouldn’t have survived. The analogy for all of us is everybody needs a tap code and everybody needs that support.”**

**(Dr. Dennis Charney)**

· What does it take to build healthy, supportive relationships?

· Take a lesson from the C-Suite panel...

· Do you recognize any of these poor listeners?

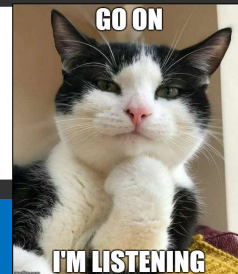
- The Faker
- The Interrupter
- The Intellectual Listener
- The One-Upper
- The Rebuttal Maker
- The Advice Giver



· Be committed to *wanting to* understand what the speaker is saying; Focus on understanding, rather than planning your reply

· Turn toward the person; Lean in; Put away cell phone/distractions

· Nod; 'Uh-huh'; Responsive expressions



· Ask appropriate follow-up questions

· Use paraphrasing and statements of empathy

· Realize that you may have to sift past anger to get at what's really going on



Which is a more accurate measure of the quality of a relationship?

- A. How partners respond to each others' disappointments
- B. How partners respond to each others' good news

(Lyubomirsky)

## HOW DO WE RESPOND WHEN OTHERS SHARE THEIR GOOD NEWS WITH US?

1. **Passive & Constructive Response:** "Congrats! Good job."
2. **Passive & Destructive Response:** "What's for dinner?"
3. **Active & Destructive Response:** "Do you know what tax bracket this will put us in? I'm going down to run the numbers now."
4. **Active & Constructive Response (ACR):**
  - "Oh my gosh, I am so excited for you. You deserve it!"
  - "What were you doing when your supervisor told you? How did she begin the conversation?"
  - "Were you excited? Surprised?"
  - "Should we pop a bottle of the bubbly to celebrate? I'm so very proud of you."

Pay close attention to the people who don't clap when you win.  
*Unknown*

(Dr. Shelly Gable)

## **STRATEGY 5: INCREASE YOUR SELF-AWARENESS.**

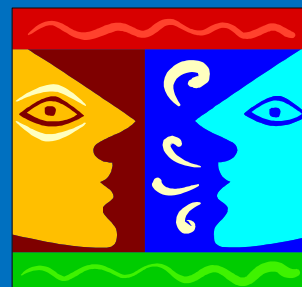
Can you  
answer these  
Self-Awareness  
questions?

**The Tale of the  
Rotting  
Morel Mushrooms**



## **WHAT IS SELF-AWARENESS, AND HOW IS IT RELATED TO PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE?**

- To know what 'makes you tick'
- To know what motivates you, what makes you happy, what you're good at
- To know what types of people, work tasks, and situations energize you



- To know what types of people and situations drain you or 'push your buttons'
- To know what types of activities will truly rejuvenate you when you have time away from work
- To recognize your emotions when you're having them

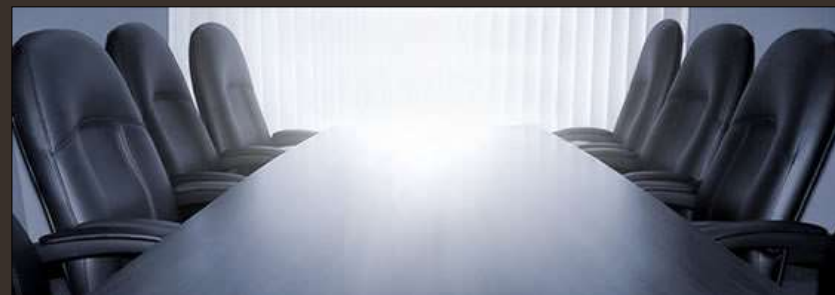


(Bradberry & Greaves, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*)



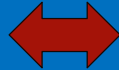
### **Do the 60-Second Emotions Check:**

- What am I feeling? Why?
- What have I been doing?
- Who have I been with?
- What have I been thinking about or telling myself?



**Be Aware of Who Is And Isn't  
on Your Personal Board of Directors.**

**Best Self**



**Worst Self**

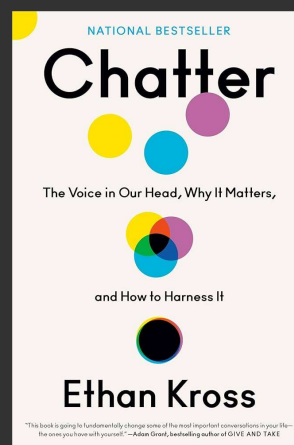
- What are the types of people, events, and situations that bring out the best in me?
- What are the types of people, events, and situations that bring out the worst in me?

**STRATEGY 6:**  
**TAP INTO RECENT RESEARCH**  
**REGARDING PROTECTION FROM STRESS.**

**Pair Up!**  
Who wants to talk about their bad day? 😊

**For Almost-Instant  
Stress Relief When  
Worrying...**

- **Speak 'In Your Head'**  
**Using Distanced  
Language**



## **STRATEGY 7: CHECK YOUR INTERPRETATIONS FOR ACCURACY.**

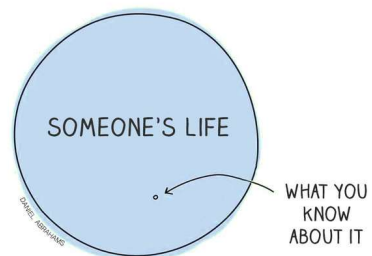


**Is my interpretation accurate?  
Are there other, equally valid, interpretations?  
Am I villainizing?  
(Yes, it is possible to villainize an entire department!)**

-adapted from *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High*, Patterson, et al

## **The Empathy Activity**

WHY YOU SHOULD  
BE KIND TO PEOPLE



## STRATEGY 8: CREATE YOUR OWN IDENTITY.

"I am not a cat"

394th Judicial District Court

Recording of this hearing or live stream  
is prohibited.

Violation may constitute contempt of  
court and result in a fine of up to \$500  
and a jail term of up to 180 days.

394th Judicial District Court



What are your two words?

### Four Key Identities:

Remembered  
Reflected  
Programmed  
Created

(Goldsmith, *Mojo*)



- Ask, “*Who do I want to be?*”
- List five words/traits that you want to live out in your daily life...and review it often!



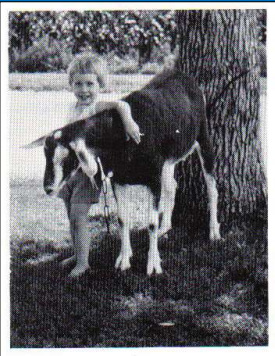
**STRATEGY 9:**  
**RECOGNIZE THE POWER WITHIN YOU TO  
CREATE A ‘NEW NORMAL’ AT WORK OR HOME.**

- **The cat raised in a show horse barn...**



## The people around us influence what feels 'normal' to us:

- Be careful about what starts to feel 'normal'!
- Who are the people that you spend the most time with, by choice?
- Be the one to 'create a new normal' in your family, community, company, or life.



## **STRATEGY 10:** **LIVE AND WORK WITH MOJO!**

- The *Life Can Be Annoying Quiz!*
- *"Sounds like life to me."*
- Reality:  
*People are drawn to  
be around upbeat people.*

(Diener & Biswas-Diener, *Happiness: Unlocking The Mysteries of Psychological Wealth*)



Please be aware of the energy  
you bring into this space.

# MOJO vs. NOJO

(Marshall Goldsmith, *Mojo: How To Get It, How To Keep It, How To Get It Back If You Lose It*)

- ✓ Take responsibility
- ✓ Move forward
- ✓ Run the extra mile
- ✓ Love doing it
- ✓ Appreciate opportunities
- ✓ Make the best of it
- ✓ Inspirational
- ✓ Grateful
- ✓ Curious
- ✓ Caring
- ✓ Zest for life
- ✓ Awake

- ✓ Play the victim
- ✓ March in place
- ✓ Satisfied with the minimum
- ✓ Feel obligated to do it
- ✓ Tolerate requirements
- ✓ Endure it
- ✓ Painful to be around
- ✓ Resentful
- ✓ Uninterested
- ✓ Indifferent
- ✓ Zombie-like
- ✓ Asleep



**Recognize when  
you are getting  
grumpy and ask,  
“What do I need?”**



## THE MENTALLY STRONG LEADER

What is one point that will stick with you from this session?



THIS IS  
THE SIGN  
YOU'VE BEEN  
LOOKING FOR

## CLOSING WISDOM...

On a daily basis,  
learn to  
Enjoy the  
Glazed Donut!

(Diener & Biswas-Diener)





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